

On M Aversion of Men of
Taste*

belief in Christianity was no more than a deference to the authority of the church, and whose occasional allusions or testimonies to it would recognise it in no higher character than that in which it appears as degraded into a superstition ; so that there would be only a fallacious or equivocal glimmer of Christianity thrown occasionally on their pages of moral sentiment.

In this assumption in favour of our polite literature, against that of the popish countries, I set out of view, on both sides, that portion which is of directly immoral or infidel tendency; since it is not at all my object to comment on the antichristian effect of the palpably vicious part of our literature, but to indicate a certain moral and religious insalubrity in much of that which, in general account, is for the most part tolerably accordant, and in many instances actively subversive, to truth and virtue.

Going over from the vicious and irreligious to the directly opposite quarter, neither do I include in the literature on which I am animadverting any class of authors formally theological, not even the most admired sermon writers in our language ; because it is probable that works specifically theological have not been admitted to constitute more than a small part of that school of thinking and taste, in which the generality of cultivated men have acquired the moral habitude of their minds. That school is composed of poets, moral philosophers, historians, essayists, and you may add the writers of fiction. If the great majority of these authors have injured, and still injure, their pupils in the most important of all their interests, it is a very serious consideration, both in respect to the accountableness of the authors, and the final effect on their pupils. I maintain that they are guilty of this injury.

On so wide a field, my dear friend, it would be in vain to attempt making particular references and selections to verify all these remarks. . I must appeal for their truth to your own acquaintance with our popular fine writers.

In the first place, and as a general observation, the alleged injury has been done, to a great extent, by Omission, or rather it should be called Exclusion. I do not refer so much to that unworthy care, maintained through the works of our ingenious authors to avoid *formally* treating on any topics of an expressly evangelical kind, as to the absence of that